

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, too often we have set-piece speeches in the Senate without any resort to the traditional debate, where two sides are equally dividing time without a set script on a critical issue before our country. I would like to restart the true Senate tradition of debate with a debate with my colleague from Delaware.

I will yield to him right now.

Mr. COONS. I thank Senator KIRK. I am grateful for the Senator inviting me to join him in a real debate on the floor on an issue about which we disagree and about which we cast opposing votes earlier today. It is an issue of real import to our country. It is something that has been debated in the past and will be in the future but essentially whether we should have a balanced budget amendment.

Mr. KIRK. What I would like to do now, in sort of a chess clock style, is take 10 minutes, with unanimous consent, to be equally divided between me and the Senator from Delaware on the subject of the balanced budget amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). Without objection, it is so ordered. For 10 minutes, the Senator from Illinois and the Senator from Delaware may engage in a colloquy. The Parliamentarian will keep track of the time of each, to the best of our capability.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. President, the United States needs to adopt a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. It was a good idea when Thomas Jefferson backed it and it is an even more important idea today. What we are seeing in Europe is a collapse of government finance because they have spent too much, taxed too much, and borrowed too much. Not only do they have a crisis of their government debt, but they have higher taxes and lower economic performance because of that philosophy.

We cannot repeat that mistake. That is why the Senate should have adopted a balanced budget amendment. I will speak in bipartisan fashion—any of the balanced budget amendments we considered today would have been better, rather than to subject our country to a rising tide of debt and an economic model which is already, we are seeing, failing in Europe.

Mr. COONS. I could not agree more that we need to be responsible; that the United States and this Senate need to face our serious and crippling national deficits and debt.

It was a good idea when Thomas Jefferson recognized that a balanced budget amendment was a bad idea. Thomas Jefferson actually, several years later, after supporting a balanced budget amendment, acted as President in ways that demonstrated he understood that real opportunities required extraordinary capabilities by the Federal Government.

I was a county executive. Others in this Chamber who were mayors or Gov-

ernors lived with balanced budget requirements and it imposed great restrictions on us. It forced us to make tough decisions on annual timelines, so I understand why it is tempting to consider passing one of the balanced budget amendments that were before this Chamber today.

But there is a difference between the Federal Government and the State and local governments. Thomas Jefferson acted decisively to make the Louisiana Purchase possible and to finance the War of 1812. During the current economic downturn, if the Federal Government had not been able to borrow and invest in restoring growth to this country, we would not have had a great recession, we would have had a second depression. I am convinced of it, and it is one of the reasons I think, had the balanced budget amendment been in place, we would have been in even greater trouble than we have been over the last few years.

Mr. KIRK. What we see now, today, though, is that we are awash in \$15 trillion in debt and that since the creation of the triple A credit rating by Standard & Poor's, the United States has now lost that rating.

When young Americans are born today, they already owe the Federal Government \$40,000. So they will have a lower income and a higher tax burden throughout their working lives because of the debts put on them.

The biggest reason for a balanced budget amendment, though, is we have a structural inability to represent young Americans. They cannot vote until they are age 18. Yet the representatives of their parents can transfer tremendous burdens onto that young generation of Americans. The essence of the American dream is that our children's lives will be better than our own. But given the weight of the debt we are now transferring onto the backs of the next generation, that may no longer be possible.

We absolutely have to have a structural way to prevent one generation from transferring new spending and new debt to the new generation so the American ideal is preserved and so they have a fighting chance to have a better life than their parents.

Mr. COONS. This Senate can, should, and has shown the ability to reach balanced budgets—no, in fact, surpluses—within living memory. In fact, when President Clinton was the President, this Senate and the House acted together. They adopted budgetary self-restraint.

Why amend the Constitution of the United States, our most foundational document, when we have within our own power, recently demonstrated in the late 1990s, the capacity to control ourselves?

The Senator and I agree we are leaving to our children an enormous, crushing legacy of a national debt that has exceeded safe boundaries. But why amend the Constitution in order to force the Senate to do our job? Instead,

I think we should embrace some of the tough, big, bold, bipartisan proposals that have been put on the table—whether the Bowles-Simpson Commission or others. The framework of a broad deal that requires sacrifice from all, changes to the spiraling Federal spending, and changes in the direction of the country is on the table before us. Why take a detour into amending America's foundational document rather than simply stepping up and doing the job that is before us?

Mr. KIRK. The job of each generation is to make sure the Constitution deals with critical problems facing the country, so we amended the Constitution so we could prohibit slavery. We amended the Constitution so we could grant women the right to vote. We should amend the Constitution to prevent one generation from encumbering the next generation.

America is the greatest experiment in self-government and, more important, the underlying value of self-rule ever designed. But we have seen in recent days that self-control disappear. We work in the Senate, now well onto I think 900 days, without a budget. This is the most successful corporation, the most successful enterprise on Earth, representing the real aspiration for human dignity and freedom. Yet that is in danger if we become indebted to China and other countries in ways that no previous generation of Americans have done. This country has regularly amended the Constitution to fix inequities in our society, and the growing inequity we see today is debt and deficits, especially to other countries. Therefore, we should amend the Constitution to protect those who cannot yet vote from an economic fate that would otherwise befall them.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On the Senator's side, 2 minutes 20 seconds; on the side of the Senator from Illinois, 1 minute 16 seconds.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, as the good Senator from Illinois suggests, we are, indeed, encumbering future generations with a debt that has risen above \$40,000 per American. This is a central challenge of our time, one in which our national security leadership has cited as critical to ensuring our security and our liberty going forward. But, in my view, the balanced budget amendment that was advanced through S.J. Res. 10 earlier today would compel exactly the sort of intergenerational burdens that my good friend from Illinois suggests he seeks to avoid.

Let me be clear. The requirements of that balanced budget amendment include a spending cap, a supermajority requirement to raise the national debt, and a two-thirds requirement for any increase in Federal revenue. Those in combination would compel drastic, immediate, and substantial reductions in a wide range of programs—such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, veterans benefits—that if imposed would

have not just a short-term, very negative impact on our current economy but a significant restructuring of the longstanding relationships between individual citizens and generations.

Yes, leaving a legacy of debt to the next generation is a terrible thing for us to do, but leaning on the crutch of the Constitution and the fig leaf of a constitutional amendment to avoid doing our responsibility—a job which the Senate is fully capable of doing—avoids that responsibility to the next generation.

I close with this question: As we say in the law, if there is a right, what is the remedy? If we were to pass this constitutional amendment, how would it be enforced if the Senate in the future were to fail to balance the budget? Would lifetime Federal judges around the country be imposing choices in terms of budget cuts, spending cuts, revenue changes? I think that would be no better—in fact, far worse—than the Senate simply doing its job.

Today I voted against this balanced budget amendment because I think we have it within our power to show self-control and to secure the future for the next generation of Americans.

Mr. KIRK. I would close by saying the Senator and I agree. I think the Simpson-Bowles plan is the right way to go, and my hope is that we join together on a bipartisan basis to reduce expected Federal borrowing by \$4 trillion along the lines of that bipartisan Presidential commission. But, unfortunately, the Simpson-Bowles plan is gathering dust. The supercommittee that was given procedural powers to possibly put that forward also collapsed. We have not been able to do our job, and we are now encumbering the next generation with even greater amounts of debt—historic amounts.

I think the Founding Fathers did not contemplate the ability to borrow as much from other countries as we now have, and with the United States as the center of freedom and democracy around the world there is a lot riding on the credit of the United States.

My colleague from Delaware talks about a very vital future—especially for people like my own mother—of Social Security and Medicare, but I think she understands that a bankrupt country cannot support Social Security and Medicare. We have to defend the credit of the United States, and therefore I think a balanced budget amendment is essential to the long-term future of the United States.

With that, I thank my colleague.

Mr. President, we have just finished. I hope we do return to a tradition of actual debate, and I thank my colleague for the chance to carry out this debate.

Mr. COONS. I thank the Senator.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO MAJOR GENERAL BENNY LANDRENEAU

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, while we have a bit of quiet time on the Senate floor this evening, I thought I would make brief remarks about the extraordinary career of MG Benny Landreneau. General Landreneau recently retired as the most senior Adjutant General in the Nation, with nearly 14 years of service as head of the Louisiana National Guard, serving under three Governors, and nearly four decades of service to the State of Louisiana and our Nation.

Over many years I have had the joy and pleasure of calling General Landreneau a friend and a colleague and I have worked closely with him and the 11,000 members of our Louisiana National Guard. Through the September 11 attacks on our country and through Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustaf, and Ike and the recent BP oil-spill—one of the largest environmental disasters in our Nation's history—General Landreneau has proven his leadership to the people of Louisiana and our Nation time and time again.

Benny, as he is known by his friends, credits his father with inspiring him to serve in the National Guard. His father Joseph Audley Landreneau was a World War II veteran and engineering soldier and a combat veteran. Benny, who grew up in Vidrine, LA, chose to follow in his father's footsteps and quickly rose through the ranks in the Louisiana National Guard.

As a young man, in 1969 he enlisted as a light weapons infantryman in the 773rd Maintenance Battalion. Two and a half years later he graduated from Officer Candidate School and became a second lieutenant platoon leader as part of the 3671st Maintenance Company. From those very early beginnings in the National Guard, he progressed rapidly through the ranks.

During his time with the Guard, General Landreneau was part of several major campaigns, including a deployment during Desert Storm. During the first gulf war General Landreneau and his 527th Engineer Battalion were tasked with any number of important missions, including the No. 1 mission for the gulf war commander himself, GEN Fred Franks.

General Franks needed an unmanned aerial vehicle landing strip built immediately, so he knew who to call to get that job done. He called Benny Landreneau and his battalion. Need I say that it was done, I am sure, under budget and before time.

After the 527th returned to the command headquarters, General Franks called General Landreneau to thank

him for what he did, which was extraordinary, and asked the general what he could do as a return favor. Without blinking an eye, General Landreneau just said:

Sir, please, if you could get us home for Mother's Day, it would be appreciated.

So all of the mostly guys were home from other States—some women in the battalion as well—and they were thrilled to be home with their parents.

In 1996, shortly after the gulf war, General Landreneau retired from the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources where he served also as a State conservationist for almost 30 years. Since that time, he has taken the National Guard in Louisiana from a strategic reserve force to an operational force that continues to lead the Nation both on and off the battlefield, and I will talk about off the battlefield in just a minute.

General Landreneau was quoted as saying:

The Louisiana National Guard soldiers and airmen are part of the finest National Guard in America. It is their dedication and professionalism, their commitment and their hard work that has made the Louisiana National Guard the finest guard in America. The Louisiana National Guard has performed in such an outstanding matter in accepting these new challenges of being an operational force and responding to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and deploying throughout the world when called on and, at the same time, being able to take up the work of their State emergencies—

Which have been too numerous to count—and being able to respond to the citizens of this State in an outstanding fashion.

This is due in part, I say, to his leadership and vision.

General Landreneau has also been instrumental in implementing one of the most phenomenal programs in our country: the Louisiana National Guard Youth Challenge Program. It is part of the National Youth Challenge Program. This is what I mean by off-the-battlefield expertise as well as on-the-battlefield expertise.

Some years ago—I think about 15—when General Conway was the general for the National Guard, he helped to start this program that now has graduated over 100,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 18 who are unfortunately drifting from the straight and narrow path. They haven't ended up in prison yet, but they are headed that way. They have given up on themselves. They have gotten into a little bit of trouble and need a second chance. This program offers them that chance.

Under General Landreneau's leadership, we run three of the dozens of programs operating in the United States. I might say we run the best three, having been granted and acknowledged with awards in ceremonies for many years in Louisiana and having graduated the largest number of young people. This has been done because of General Landreneau's extraordinary commitment to the citizens of our State